

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.58984/smbic2301229r>

PROMOTIONAL ASPECTS OF SPORTS PRODUCTS

Milijanka Ratković⁴³, Andrijana Kos Kavran⁴⁴, Velibor Zolak⁴⁵

Abstract: Equating promotion with marketing is incorrect but common. One of the reasons is that each of the elements of the marketing mix in the sports market, as the most famous concept in this area, has promotional characteristics. As the first element, the sports product has several contexts in which its promotional potential can be shown. Whether it will be used as a whole or not depends on the success of the activities that make up the brand creation process. From the product to the creation of the brand, it is necessary to implement a set of activities, usually over a long period, a significant part of which is promotion, not only through the instruments that make up its mix but also with the help of elements of the tangible and intangible part of the product. Considering the specifics of the sports market, this paper aims to define the promotional capabilities of sports products. The basic assumption is that the sports product possesses a significant set of promotional capabilities that are important for creating its recognition. This paper is theoretical, while the analysis presented indicates the existence of promotional aspects of the sports product while respecting the specifics of the sports market.

Keywords: sport events, athletes as brands, physical product, service, marketing mix.

⁴³ PhD, Full professor, the Faculty of Sport, University "Union – Nikola Tesla", Narodnih heroja 30, New Belgrade, Serbia, phone number: +381606106005, <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7946-354X>; E-mail: milijanka.raovic@fzs.edu.rs

⁴⁴ PhD, College professor, Međimurje University of Applied Sciences, Bana Josipa Jelačića 22a, Čakovec, Croatia, phone number: +38540396990, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1441-0321>; E-mail: akos@mev.hr

⁴⁵ Lecturer, the Faculty of Sports Management, University „Donja Gorica“, Oktoih 1, Podgorica, Monenegro phone number: +38269017444; E-mail: velibor.zolak@udg.edu.me

Introduction

The sports market is specific regarding certain characteristics compared to other markets (Krajnović et al., 2016). Those specificities stem from the characteristics of its two essential parts, namely the primary and secondary segments (Ratković et al., 2022; Ratković et al., 2022a). The specifics of the primary sports market directly stem from the essential characteristics of its participants, i.e., athletes who play a vital role in the realization of sports events but who themselves are the subjects on which marketing and promotional tools are applied (Savić et al., 2017). The secondary market is where manufacturers and traders of sports clothing, footwear, and props participate as well as sports service providers, such as those represented in the fitness industry. The significant part of the fitness industry in the overall sports market is a unique feature of the secondary sports market (CompanyWall, 2022; Grand View Research, 2023; Tsitskari, Tsakiraki, 2013; Somphong, 2020; Wang, Chiu, 2022; Thompson, 2022). The third market is the sports market support, which is the subject of analysis in situations where certain participants, who usually have no contact points with the sports market, take a specific part in it. The most common example is sponsorship-based partnerships (Zdrilic et al., 2017; Ratković, Dašić, 2018; Kos Kavran et al., 2020). In addition to the above, the significant role of the media in the primary sports market is another peculiarity because it is the media, with an emphasis on social media, that influences the success of the positioning of participants in this part of the sports market (Siguencia, 2017; Nisar et al., 2018; Kalinová, Kovaříková, 2023).

This paper focuses on defining the promotional aspects of sports products in the primary and secondary markets. A sports product means a sports event, an athlete, a physical product, and a service. For precise analysis, it is necessary to list all the peculiarities of both mentioned segments of the sports market and then focus on discovering those that have implications in creating the promotional potential of sports products, with the goal of creating a brand. The paper aims to define the promotional aspects of the sports product. H0 stands out as the primary hypothesis: *The sports product has a significant set of promotional capacities.*

Following the above, the beginning points in this paper are the relations connected to the sports market, sports products, promotions, and sports brands. The paper will point out the peculiarities of the sports market, and the promotional capacities of sports products, considering their diversity based on the part of the market where they come from, as well as the total promotional capacities that come from the set of promotional tools and from the mentioned product potentials, which are used in the process of creating a sports brand.

The context of the analysis of the promotional aspects of the sports product based on the specifics of the sports market

Decisions about promotion, as well as on all other marketing mix elements, cannot be made separately from decisions on other elements as they are linked to information obtained through research processes. Respecting the promotion capacities in the sports market, especially in its primary segment, it is necessary to identify the promotion capacities of other marketing mix elements. As the subject of this paper is the promotional potential of the product, the focus of the analysis of the context in which these potentials are manifested will be the basic starting point. In this sense, it should be emphasized that the sports market includes the primary and secondary segments, as well as individual participants of the support market, in the conditions when they establish certain forms of partnership (Ratković et al., 2022; Ratković et al., 2022a). One of the most common is the sponsorship relationship in the primary sports market (Segovia, Kennett, 2022). The primary and secondary markets, including the media, and entities from the support market in situations where they establish cooperation with the primary market, comprise the sports industry.

The first peculiarity of the sports market stems from the definition of the types of sports products. Namely, a sports product means a tangible physical product such as a pair of sneakers or an exercise device, but also the athlete himself, which is the object of investment and has a specific value. Also, it has a loyal audience and a particular image and can be a globally recognizable brand (Dašić et al., 2021; Ratković, Dašić, 2018; Dugalić, Ivić, 2015). The characteristics mentioned above are also present in sports products like the examples mentioned, except that it is about customers instead of the audience.

In addition to the uniqueness of sports markets, which stems from the fact that the athlete is also a product, another unique feature is that this market has a significant presence in sports events. Regarding these events, as well as the athletes who are the core of their offer, the importance of the media should be emphasized. Namely, sports events and athletes could only be globally known if they had the support of the media. The connection between these three focuses of the primary sports market is crucial for successfully realizing their promotion and self-promotion. In addition to the role of the media as a creator and sender of a message about an athlete or a sports event, they are also used in self-promotion with the help of social networks (Kalinová, Kovaříková, 2023; Dašić et al., 2021).

Another important peculiarity of the sports market stems from its second part, which is the fact that the fitness industry occupies a significant share and growth present at the global level (Tsitskari, Tsakiraki, 2013; Somphong, 2020; Walter, 2022; Chiu, 2022).

The peculiarity of the sports service, a product of the fitness industry, stems from the very characteristic of the service, which is primarily intangible and whose quality depends to a significant extent on the service providers. Moreover, precisely in this lies its promotional capacity, which is the readiness, skills, and knowledge of employees who produce and deliver services to promote that same service (Ratković, 2009). Their importance is more significant because the potential of direct relations with service users can be used to promote both the service itself and the individual who produces and provides it, as well as the fitness centre itself. However, the main peculiarity of the second part of the sports market is that its growth is directly related to the success of development and the level of popularity of the overall primary market and its parts.

Without going into further specifics of the sports market, the context of this analysis of the promotional capacities of the sports product can be concluded by emphasizing the importance of the integration of digital technologies into the sports industry and the emergence of a new market called eSports (Reitman, 2020; Cheng, 2023). The promotional capacities of this environment are available to many businesses, which means they are potentially profitable if the target group is in that environment. The product itself of this market has significant possibilities of integrating promotional techniques precisely because it is used in a digital environment.

The promotional capacities of the elements of the marketing mix, in this case, the so-called 5P, are found in the elements of the expanded version of the total offered product, in the marketing strategy of price creation, as well as in the advantages of arranging the point of sale, employee satisfaction and knowledge, and finally in specific promotional techniques. Among these techniques, public relations and sponsorship occupy a special place in the sports market, but also publicity, fairs and exhibitions, personal selling, sales promotion, economic propaganda, etc. (Ratković et al., 2014). Public relations and sponsorship are the most common promotional techniques in the primary sports market (Zdrilic et al., 2017; Ratković et al., 2022).

The prerequisites for creating a sports brand are several factors that can be realized as continuous processes. In other words, consistency, in terms of continuity and quality, is the common basis for creating a brand. In addition to quality, continuity, internal marketing, leadership, total quality management, positioning, and repositioning over a longer period, a good combination of communications is a fundamental prerequisite for creating and brand management (Milenović, Ratković, 2021). These communications include decisions about the media, messages, and different techniques. However, they also contain all the potential of the sports product itself, then prices, but also points of sale, employees, etc. The subject of analysis in this paper is the promotional potential of a sports product, keeping in mind that a product can

be a sports event, an athlete, a physical product, but also a service, as well as taking into account all the specifics of the sports market, especially those arising from the categories of sports products as mentioned earlier, the following part of the paper will discuss the elements of the product that can have a promotional potential.

Identifying key promotional aspects of sports products

A sports event as a product has promotional capacities based on the preparation of the location where it takes place, but also based on the athletes participating in its realization, who at the same time represent a promotional resource. The audience's perception of the environment determines the success of the promotional elements found in the preparation of the location where the event takes place and the overall organization of the event. The perception of a sporting event directly affects its image (Cevallos, 2020). On the other hand, for those who follow the same event through social networks or TV, the promotional capacities of the sporting event are closely related and depend on the quality of the broadcast, that is, the quality of the chosen media. In both cases, the image and recognition of the athletes participating in the event are positively correlated with its aspect of self-promotion. At the same time, sporting events have the potential to promote the destinations where they take place, and by improving their image, better success in destination branding can be achieved.

In addition to its role as a promotional potential of a sports event, an athlete also represents a product with its value, image, and fans. Globally famous athletes are global brands that have gained their recognition both through the application of various promotional techniques, adapted to the fact that they are people, not physical products, and through their self-promotion, which is based on their professional skills, but also on highlighting the values that are important to society. In today's environment, this process is most certainly based on the promotional capacities of social networks managed by the athlete or his team. In addition to managing social networks, for the purpose of self-promotion, an athlete should be skilled in communication in all other environments, both media and personal (Ratković, Dašić, 2018). This skill represents his essential promotional potential, and it depends directly on him.

Athletes have a promotional potential many times greater than the promotional capacity of a sports event. The promotional capacity can be found in the following roles of an athlete: as a promoter of his sponsor, media in brand promotion (Dugalić, Ivić, 2015), as a club promoter, promoter of socially responsible topics, promoter of the state and nation, and promoter of his brands.

For sports events and athletes, the prerequisites for creating a brand are not entirely the same as for physical products and services. Nevertheless, each of those mentioned in the last part of the paper can be used in an adapted form concerning the specifics of these two products of the primary sports market (Cevallos, 2020).

A specific set of services accompanies each physical product; most often, each service is accompanied by a physical product. In the first case, more significant promotional capacity is found in accompanying services, while in the second case, it is more present in services. Physical products consist of tangible and intangible parts. Their tangible part is what comes out of production, after which the intangible part is added, and after that, by including promotional techniques and other mentioned promotional potentials of the marketing mix and marketing instruments in general, that sports product has a chance to become a brand. The intangible part of the product from which the promotional capacity derives consists of delivery, assembly, after-sales service, brand, warranty, and image. The tangible part of the product is not only the product's core but also the packaging, quality, and design. All the mentioned elements of the tangible and intangible parts of the sports product are, to a certain extent, promotional capacities because they all communicate with the market and influence the perception of the target groups.

The overall promotional capacities of a sports product are its identity, so any other promotion strategy must be based on the message sent by such a product. The case is the same with sports services, only that the employees as producers and service providers have a greater power of integrated promotion and a holistic approach since the service is produced, sold, and consumed in one place. Both with physical products and services, the role of employees is significant. However, services are still much more critical, given that they are integrated into production and delivery. Additionally, with services, the environment in which they are sold is much more important, and this element also represents its significant promotional capacity, which cannot be analyzed separately (Renko, Grgic, 2012; Sokolović-Mladenović et al., 2015). Therefore, in addition to the employees, who are the potential of the tangible part of the service, the delivery process, quality, design, and the physical product accompanying it are also essential elements that represent its promotional potential. In addition to the location in which it is sold, an intangible part of the service is the brand and image.

Regarding sports brands, there is a trend of association to achieve better positioning based on the synergistic effect of joint activities, among which is promotion. The literature sees this type of association as a partnership for profit (Ratković, 2021). It is considered that the sports market is ideal for achieving positive effects of partnership, regardless of whether one party is a sports entity and the other from another market or both are from the sports market. For example, announcing the latest collaboration

between two well-known sports brands, Les Mills and Adidas, is expected to produce a synergistic effect in the promotion and other aspects of this relationship. Another interesting example that certainly has the effect of a partnership in promoting its brands is the collaboration between G2Esport and the fashion brand Ralph Lauren. This collaboration was achieved by including the famous gamer Martin "Rekkles" Larsson in the Wimbledon campaign, which Ralph Lauren did.

Conclusion

A sports product's self-promotional potential, whether a sporting event, athlete, physical product, or service, is part of the overall promotion plan. These potentials are parts of products that represent their identity, and the overall message intended to be marketed to target groups is based on them. At the same time, this process is the essence of the product branding process. Also, putting certain product features into the function of promotion is not a process complementary only to the application of promotional instruments but also to a broader range of marketing potentials. They come from other marketing mix elements and the overall potential of marketing tools and processes.

The theoretical analysis presented in this paper considers the specifics of the sports market, which derive from the first two mentioned products, that is, from the characteristics of the sports event and the athlete in the role of the product. In addition, to explain the promotional potential in more detail, the paper also reviewed the broader context of the place of sports products in the sports market. From all the above, it can be concluded that the sports product has a wide range of promotional capacities and that depending on the type of product, that set is based on the very core of the product, such as athletes and sports events, or on the features that result from the expanded version, as with physical products. In the case of sports services, promotional opportunities arise mainly from their characteristics, which are part of extended versions of the service, but also from their core since employees are their integral element.

Following the above, it is considered that the primary hypothesis H0: *The sports product has a significant set of promotional capacities*, has been confirmed. Further directions of theoretical analysis on the promotional aspects of sports products could lead to individual analyses of all mentioned here, especially athletes, given that their role in the sports market from the marketing side is multiple.

References

1. Cevallos, M., Mario Alguacil, D., Calabuig Moreno, F. (2020): Influence of Brand Image of a Sports Event on the Recommendation of Its Participants, *Sustainability*, vol. 12, no. 12: 5040, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12125040>.
2. Cheng, M., Chen, L., Pan, Q., Gao, Y., Li, J. (2023): E-sports playing and its relation to lifestyle behaviors and psychological well-being: A large-scale study of collegiate e-sports players in China, *Complementary Therapies in Clinical Practice*, vol. 51, 101731, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ctcp.2023.101731>.
3. Dašić, D., Ratković, M., Pavlović, M. (2021): Commercial Aspects of Personal Branding of Athletes on Social Networks. *Marketing*, vol. 52, no. 2, pp. 118-131.
4. Dugalić, S., Ivić, J. (2015): Angažovanje slavnih sportista u promociji proizvoda i usluga, *Marketing*, vol. 46, no. 3, pp. 207-216.
5. Grand View Research (2023): Virtual Fitness Market Size, Share & Trends Analysis Report By Streaming Type (Live, On-demand), By Session Type (Group, Solo), By Device Type, By Region, And Segment Forecasts, 2023 – 2030. *Market Analysis Report*, ID: GVR-4-68040-032-6, (available at: <https://www.grandviewresearch.com/industry-analysis/virtual-fitness-market-report>).
6. Kalinová E., Kovaříková, H. (2023): *Using social networks in business*, *SHS Web Conf.: Innovative Economic Symposium 2022 – Opportunities in Post-Covid Era (IES2022)* vol. 160, article no. 01013, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1051/shsconf/202316001013>.
7. Kos Kavran, A., Kralj, A., Ratković, M. (2020): *Sportski marketing*, Čakovec, Međumursko veleučilište u Čakovcu.
8. Krajnovic, A., Duka, I., Bosna, J. (2016): Specifičnosti marketinga u sportu, *Oeconomicus*. vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 46-60.
9. Milenović, B., Ratković, M. (2021): *Marketing*, Fakultet za poslovne studije i pravo, Beograd.
10. Nisar, T.M., Prabhakar, G., Patil, P.P. (2018): Sports clubs' use of social media to increase spectator interest, *International Journal of Information Management*, vol. 43, pp. 188-195, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2018.08.003>.
11. Ratković, M. (2009): Interni marketing u funkciji povećanja zadovoljstva kupaca, *Marketing*, vol. 40, no. 4, pp. 269-275.
12. Ratković, M., Dašić, D. (2018): *Marketing u sportu sa elementima industrije sporta*, MBS, Beograd.
13. Ratković, M., Kos Kavran, A., Zolak, V. (2022): *Značaj odnosa s javnošću u kriznim situacijama u industriji sporta*, Kočović, P. i sar. (ed) *Zbornik radova. Osmo među-*

narodna konferencija ANTiM: Primena novih tehnologija u menadžmentu i ekonomiji, Beograd, vol. 1., pp. 383-394.

14. Ratković, M., Kos Kavran, A., Zolak, V. (2022a): *Marketinški aspekti poslovanja NIKE-a – od društvene neodgovornosti do vrhunskih inovacija*. Kočović, P. i sar. (ed) *Zbornik radova. Osmo međunarodna konferencija ANTiM: Primena novih tehnologija u menadžmentu i ekonomiji*, Beograd, vol. 1., pp. 369-382.
15. Ratković, M.C., Marković, J.Đ., Panagopulos, A., Bajrić, A. (2014): The strategy of sport promotion of badminton in Serbia, *Sport Science*, vol. 7, no. 2, pp. 120-132.
16. Reitman, J. G., Anderson-Coto, M. J., Wu, M., Lee, J. S., Steinkuehler, C. (2020): Esports Research: A Literature Review, *Games and Culture*, vol. 15, no. 1, pp. 32–50, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412019840892>.
17. Renko, S., Grgić, I. (2012): The importance of store windows in creating store identity and store attractiveness. *Marketing*, vol. 43, no. 4, pp. 270-278.
18. Savić, Z., Ranđelović, N., Stojanović, N., Stanković, V., Šiljak, V. (2017): *The Sport Industry and achieving top sports results*, *Facta Universitatis*, vol. 15, no. 3., pp. 513-532.
19. Segovia, G.M., Kennett, C. (2022): Digitalization and Sports Sponsorship Strategy: A Review and Research Agenda. *Ann Appl Sport Sci*, vol. 10, no. 4.
20. Siguencia, L.O., Herman, D., Marzano, G., Rodak, P. (2016): The Role of Social Media in Sports Communication Management: An Analysis of Polish Top League Teams' Strategy, *Procedia Computer Science*, vol. 104, pp. 73-80, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.procs.2017.01.074>.
21. Sokolović-Mladenović, S., Čuzović, S. (2015): Retail service quality as a base in purchasing decision, *Marketing*, vol 46, no. 1, pp. 26-35.
22. Somphong, S. (2020): Marketing factors affecting the use of a fitness center in Bangkok: A case study of the PAC sports center, *African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure*, vol. 9, no. 2.
23. Tsitskari, E., Tsakiraki, A. (2013): Does satisfaction affect a member's psychological commitment to a fitness center?, *Journal of Physical Education and Sport*, vol. 13, no. 4, pp. 22-527, DOI: 10.7752/jpes.2013.04082.
24. Vincan, J. (2013): Broj teretana raste, ali u Srbiji još nema dovoljno trenera i vežbača. *CompanyWall*, (available at: <https://biznis.rs/vesti/srbija/broj-teretana-raste-ali-u-srbiji-jos-nema-dovoljno-trenera-i-vezbaca/>).
25. Walter, T. (2022): Worldwide Survey of Fitness Trends for 2022. *ACSM's Health & Fitness Journal*, vol. 26, br. 1, pp. 11-20, DOI: 10.1249/FIT.0000000000000732.
26. Wang, F. J., Chiu, W. (2022): Service encounter and repurchase intention in fitness centers: perceived value as a mediator and service innovativeness as a moderator,

Int. J. Sports Mark. Sponsorship vol. 24, no. 1, pp. 145-167, DOI: 10.1108/IJSMS-03-2022-0055.

27. Zdrilić, I., Kevrić, D., Vrkić, Ž. (2017): Sponzorstvo u sportu na primjeru hrvatskih košarkaških klubova, *Oeconomica Jadertina*, vol. 7, no. 2, pp. 51-65, (available at: <https://hrcak.srce.hr/191391>. quoted 07.06.2023).